



*This guest opinion is by Terry Dwelle, M.D., state health officer for the North Dakota Department of Health.*

*Length: Approximately 470 words*

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**October 7, 2002**

**Department of Health Supports Local Tobacco-Prevention Efforts**

by Terry Dwelle, M.D., M.P.H.T.M.

Tobacco use is a serious problem in North Dakota. Each year, we see friends, neighbors and family members die prematurely because they smoke. What's more, smoking costs the state millions in health care expenses and lost productivity.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, more people get sick and die because of tobacco use than anything else; tobacco use causes heart disease, cancer, stroke – and death.

As a physician, I have personally seen the devastation and heartache that comes from tobacco use. As state health officer, I am working for the day every North Dakotan chooses to be tobacco free. And, as a state, we are making an assertive effort to see that happen.

Tobacco use is a complex problem. There is no magic bullet. No single approach will overcome the addictiveness of nicotine or the billions of dollars spent by the tobacco industry promoting its product.

Instead, a real solution demands a comprehensive approach from many directions, including community initiatives, cessation programs, school programs and counter-marketing campaigns.

That's the type of approach the North Dakota Department of Health has taken to combat tobacco use in the state.

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Through the Community Health Grant Program, which was funded by the legislature with the state's tobacco settlement dollars, the Department of Health is working closely with local public health units to support tobacco prevention efforts across the state. Earlier this summer, every local public health unit, either individually or in cooperation with other local health units, received a portion of the \$3.7 million in funding from the Community Health Grant Program.

To receive the funding, public health units worked with their local schools and communities to develop plans for reducing youth access to tobacco, promoting quitting among youth and adults, and eliminating exposure to secondhand smoke.

To achieve these goals, local communities – in partnership with the Department of Health – have implemented tobacco policies and prevention curricula in the schools, funded programs to help people quit smoking, launched a statewide media campaign to inform the public about the dangers of secondhand smoke, and promoted tobacco-free environments.

These efforts, which have proven effective in reducing tobacco use, are best implemented at the local level.

To support local tobacco control efforts, the Department of Health provides training and technical assistance to public health units, tribal health agencies and communities. The state's tobacco control program is a working partnership between the Department of Health and local communities.

The *Healthy North Dakota* initiative launched by Gov. John Hoeven in his State of the State Address will involve all of us working together to address the behaviors that make us sick – including tobacco use.

The goal is simple: with good health, we can enjoy long, full and happy lives.

*Dr. Terry Dwelle is the state health officer for the North Dakota Department of Health.*